

AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN TOEFL PREDICTION LISTENING COMPREHENSION TEST

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Abstract

This study investigates the types and the most type of anxiety experienced by English students during the Listening Comprehension section of the TOEFL Prediction Test. Conducted at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu, the study surveyed 41 students using a questionnaire to measure different types of anxiety: physical, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and facilitative. The findings indicate that cognitive anxiety is the most prevalent, characterized by excessive worry and difficulty concentrating. However, facilitative anxiety also emerged as a dominant factor, suggesting that some students channel their stress into motivation. The study highlights the need for strategies to manage anxiety effectively, including enhanced test preparation and anxiety-reducing techniques.

Keywords: TOEFL, listening comprehension, anxiety, test anxiety, facilitative anxiety

Introduction

The TOEFL test is a standardized English proficiency exam designed to evaluate individuals' language skills, regardless of their prior training in the language. Frequently utilized as an assessment tool, the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) has become an essential requirement for university and college admissions, both internationally and domestically. Due to its widespread acceptance, many academic institutions include it as a graduation requirement. According to Samad et al., as cited in Herdianto (2022), TOEFL is an internationally recognized test commonly used to assess students' proficiency in English. Similarly, Hessel & Strand, referenced in La'biran and Dewi (2023), emphasize that English proficiency is a critical necessity in various sectors, including business, transportation, technology, and tourism. The TOEFL serves as a widely used benchmark for measuring one's ability to communicate effectively in English. Madison, as mentioned in Nurhayati and Nehe (2016), notes that the primary objective of the TOEFL is to indicate an individual's English proficiency for academic institutions, particularly in the United States and Canada, as well as for governmental and corporate recruitment processes.

The TOEFL is currently offered in multiple formats worldwide, as highlighted by Abboud and Hussein in Rahmah (2019). These formats include the Paper-Based TOEFL (PBT), the Computer-Based TOEFL (CBT), the Internet-Based TOEFL (IBT), and the Institutional Testing Program (ITP). At Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu, English students must attain a minimum TOEFL score of 450 to qualify for their thesis examination. Those who fail to achieve this benchmark must retake the test until they meet the required score. The specific format of the TOEFL administered at this university is the Paper-Based Test (PBT).

The listening comprehension section of the TOEFL PBT assesses examinees' ability to understand spoken English at different levels, including sentences, dialogues, extended conversations, and brief talks. This section is divided into three parts: Part A, consisting of 30 questions based on short dialogues; Part B, which includes eight questions related to longer conversations; and Part C, which presents 12 questions based on lectures or talks. The purpose of the listening section is to evaluate the ability to understand native English speech at a natural pace in real-life scenarios, as discussed by Pfister & Chastain in Maulana et al. (2022). Without proficiency in listening, learners may struggle to communicate effectively. Nunan, cited in Valizadeh and Alavinia (2013), describes listening as the "Cinderella skill" in language learning, often overshadowed by speaking. Many people associate language proficiency primarily with speaking and writing, treating listening and reading as secondary skills rather than fundamental competencies in their own right.

Students preparing for the TOEFL listening comprehension test often experience anxiety. Initial data collected from students taking TOEFL Prediction tests reveal that many find the listening section more challenging than the structure and reading comprehension sections. When asked about their difficulties, students mentioned that not being able to read a transcript or see the text made comprehension more difficult. Psychological research suggests that test anxiety typically has a negative impact on performance (Sapp & Zeidner in In'name, 2006). Vogely, as cited in Chen et al. (2023), conducted research involving 140 participants and identified key factors contributing to listening anxiety. These included issues related to the listening process, such as ineffective strategies and insufficient processing time, as well as personal factors like fear of failure and nervousness.

Several factors contribute to difficulties in listening comprehension, as explained by Underwood in Sarair et al. (2022). First, listeners have no control over the speed of spoken language. Second, the inability to replay spoken content poses a significant challenge. Third, limited vocabulary knowledge can impede comprehension when unfamiliar words are used. Fourth, understanding the context of a conversation may be problematic for some listeners. Finally, maintaining concentration throughout a listening passage can be difficult. Young, referenced in Wang (2010), notes that when a spoken passage is difficult to understand,

it can provoke high levels of anxiety. Additional challenges, such as inadequate vocabulary, poor grammar, and misinterpretations of listening content, can further complicate the process (Fitria in Romadhon, 2022).

Test anxiety can prevent students from focusing effectively on the listening section. As stated by Gonen in Wahdati (2019), learners may experience anxiety when listening to a foreign language due to various reasons, including the authenticity of the audio materials, the difficulty of the content, and environmental distractions such as background noise and poor audio quality.

Given these challenges, the researcher has chosen to conduct a study titled "An Analysis on English Students' Anxiety in TOEFL Prediction Listening Comprehension Test."

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze students' anxiety in the TOEFL Listening Comprehension section. The participants were 41 English Education students from the seventh and ninth semesters at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. However, only 20 students responded to the questionnaire. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on Scovel's classification of anxiety. The questionnaire included 20 items categorized into: Physical Anxiety; Cognitive Anxiety; Behavioral Anxiety; Emotional Anxiety; Facilitative Anxiety. Students responded with 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate their experiences. The collected responses were analyzed using frequency distribution tables to determine the most dominant type of anxiety.

Finding and Discussion

Finding

The findings indicate that among the 20 respondents: Cognitive Anxiety was the most prevalent, reported by 17 students. This includes excessive worry, difficulty concentrating, and overanalyzing answers; Facilitative Anxiety was the second most reported type, experienced by 17 students. Some students found anxiety beneficial in enhancing focus and motivation; Physical Anxiety was experienced by 11 students, with symptoms such as sweating and increased heart rate; Behavioral Anxiety was reported by 11 students, including tendencies to avoid or procrastinate on the listening section; Emotional Anxiety affected 10 students, causing fear and nervousness before and during the test.

These results align with previous studies that suggest listening comprehension anxiety is primarily cognitive but can also be facilitative when managed properly. The presence of facilitative anxiety suggests that some students are able to use their stress constructively to improve performance.

The data indicate that cognitive and facilitative anxiety are the most dominant types. This suggests that while many students experience stress and overthinking, a significant number also use anxiety to stay focused and motivated. The findings highlight the need for strategies to

reduce debilitating anxiety while enhancing facilitative anxiety to improve test performance.

The findings provide valuable insights into the different types of anxiety students experience during listening comprehension tasks. The explanations are as follows:

1. Cognitive Anxiety (Most Prevalent – 17 Students)

Cognitive anxiety refers to the mental aspects of stress, such as excessive worry, difficulty concentrating, and overanalyzing responses. Since it was reported by 17 out of 20 students, it appears to be the most dominant form of anxiety in listening comprehension. This suggests that many students struggle with intrusive thoughts and self-doubt, which may hinder their ability to process auditory information efficiently. When students overanalyze answers or worry about making mistakes, their working memory may become overloaded, negatively impacting their performance.

2. Facilitative Anxiety (Also Reported by 17 Students)

Interestingly, an equal number of students (17) reported experiencing facilitative anxiety. Unlike cognitive anxiety, facilitative anxiety can be beneficial—it helps students stay alert, motivated, and focused on their tasks. This suggests that some students can channel their stress in a positive way, using it as a source of motivation rather than a hindrance. When managed effectively, anxiety can enhance performance by improving concentration and engagement with the test.

3. Physical Anxiety (Experienced by 11 Students)

Physical symptoms such as sweating, increased heart rate, or restlessness were experienced by 11 students. These physiological responses indicate heightened stress levels, which could either help or hinder performance. While mild physical arousal might boost focus, excessive physical anxiety could distract students and impair their ability to listen attentively.

4. Behavioral Anxiety (Reported by 11 Students)

Behavioral anxiety is characterized by avoidance behaviors, such as procrastinating on preparation or avoiding the listening section altogether. Students who experience this type of anxiety may struggle with motivation and self-discipline, potentially leading to lower performance. Avoidance behaviors can reinforce anxiety over time, making students more apprehensive about listening tasks.

5. Emotional Anxiety (Experienced by 10 Students)

Emotional anxiety involves feelings of fear and nervousness before or during the test. The fact that half of the respondents reported experiencing emotional distress suggests that many students feel overwhelmed by listening comprehension tests. This emotional burden can negatively impact confidence and lead to poorer performance.

From the findings above it is known that:

- a) Cognitive and Facilitative Anxiety as Dominant Forms: The data show that cognitive anxiety is a major concern, but the presence of

facilitative anxiety suggests that not all stress is detrimental. Some students effectively harness anxiety to improve focus and motivation.

- b) Need for Balanced Anxiety Management Strategies: Since some anxiety can be beneficial while excessive anxiety can be harmful, strategies should focus on reducing debilitating anxiety while promoting productive stress management. Techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and cognitive restructuring could help students shift from a negative anxiety mindset to a facilitative one.
- c) Impact on Listening Comprehension Performance: The findings reinforce the idea that listening comprehension anxiety is primarily cognitive. However, the presence of physical, behavioral, and emotional anxiety suggests a multi-faceted challenge that requires different coping mechanisms.

The findings also indicate that while many students struggle with negative aspects of anxiety (such as overthinking and fear), a significant portion is able to use their anxiety constructively. Effective interventions should aim to reduce excessive worry while promoting the motivational aspects of anxiety, ultimately helping students perform better in listening comprehension tasks.

Discussion

The findings indicate that cognitive anxiety and facilitative anxiety are the most prevalent types, suggesting that while a large number of students struggle with excessive worry, many also experience anxiety in a way that enhances their motivation and concentration. This study shares multiple commonalities with earlier research on listening comprehension anxiety in TOEFL tests. One major similarity is the confirmation of listening anxiety among students, which aligns with the findings of Sarair et al. (2022) and Limandra (2013). These previous studies, like the current one, reveal that students often feel anxious when tackling the listening section of the TOEFL test. Additionally, Prastiyowati (2019) reported that concerns about missing key details and struggling with unfamiliar vocabulary significantly contribute to student anxiety, a pattern that this study also identifies.

Another point of agreement is the classification of anxiety types. Research by Kimura (2016) and Li (2022) has categorized listening anxiety into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, a framework that this study also supports. Cognitive anxiety, which includes excessive worry, overanalysis, and concentration difficulties, emerged as the most dominant form in the current research. Furthermore, Agustiana (2018) found that anxiety can coexist with motivation to improve listening skills. This observation is reinforced by the present study, which suggests that anxiety does not always hinder learning but can sometimes serve as a catalyst for improvement.

The sources of anxiety identified in this study also correspond with previous research findings. Consistent with Sarair et al. (2022) and Adalta (2022), this research highlights that students often struggle with understanding native speakers' pronunciation, rapid speech, and unfamiliar words, all of which significantly heighten anxiety. Similarly, Vogely's research cited in Chen et al. (2023) indicates that external factors such as lack of repetition, difficulty maintaining focus, and fear of failure also impact students' listening comprehension, reinforcing the conclusions drawn in the present study.

Moreover, this study builds on Scovel's research, as cited in Adalta (2022), regarding debilitating and facilitative anxiety. While some students experience anxiety that negatively affects their performance, others encounter a type of anxiety that helps them stay engaged and focused. This confirms that anxiety is not solely a hindrance but can also enhance performance under pressure in certain cases.

Despite these shared findings, the present study introduces several distinctions. A notable difference is its focus on anxiety related specifically to the TOEFL Prediction Test among students at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. Unlike broader studies such as Prastiyowati (2019) and Agustiana (2018), which examined listening anxiety in general EFL learning settings, this research centers on anxiety associated with a high-stakes test required for graduation.

Another key distinction is the identification of cognitive and facilitative anxiety as the most dominant types among students. While previous studies like Sarair et al. (2022) generally acknowledge the presence of anxiety, the current research takes an additional step by categorizing and measuring the specific types that students experience most frequently. Additionally, while much of the existing literature emphasizes the detrimental effects of anxiety, this study underscores its positive aspects. A considerable portion of students reported that their anxiety actually contributed to better focus, motivation, and determination in the listening section, an aspect that is often overlooked in past research, which primarily highlights the negative consequences of anxiety.

Lastly, this study presents a structured analysis by categorizing anxiety symptoms into physical, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and facilitative components. Unlike previous research that employs broader classifications, this approach offers a more precise understanding of how anxiety manifests among students during the TOEFL listening test. To summarize, while this study supports many findings from earlier research, it also introduces a more nuanced classification of anxiety types and sheds light on the beneficial impact of facilitative anxiety. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of student anxiety and provides valuable insights into effective management strategies to enhance learning outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study concludes that cognitive anxiety is the most prevalent form of anxiety among English students taking the TOEFL Prediction Listening Comprehension test, followed closely by facilitative anxiety. While excessive worry and overthinking negatively impact performance, some students benefit from anxiety as a motivating factor.

Suggestion

Engage in regular TOEFL listening practice with various accents and speech speeds. Develop relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, to manage anxiety before and during the test. And Participate in group discussions and peer listening exercises to build confidence. Incorporate listening exercises featuring different English accents to improve student comprehension. Teach anxiety management strategies, such as note-taking and predictive listening. Conduct mock TOEFL tests in a controlled environment to familiarize students with the test format.

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